

Councilwoman Linda M. Morad
New Bedford City Council

1 November 2019
New Bedford, MA

Letter of Opposition to Proposed Union Street Construction Project

Dear Councilwoman Linda M. Morad,

I am writing to formally register my strong opposition to the proposed and pending new construction project slated for the north side of Union Street at the corner of North Second Street, within the city center's designated Historic District (115, 117, and 121 Union Street; and 7 N Second Street).

This project calls for a new construction of a five (5!) story building with lobby/retail space on the first floor and forty-two (42!) residential apartment units on the upper floors; the public plan reveals nothing of the façade design or architecture. A structure of such height and mass is entirely inappropriate for the chosen location, where each building has no more than three floors. It is anachronistic and utterly out of character with neighboring structures within New Bedford's unique historic core. Moreover, the plan calls for a structure housing a population density more than five times the rate normally allowed by New Bedford city ordinance (5.12 per 1000 square feet as opposed to the prescribed 1 per 1000 square feet). Clearly, the potential for negative impacts stemming from these circumstances has not been considered.

Further, as planned, the project calls for wholly inadequate parking for a building of this size and potential number of residential occupants (approximately 70 persons): the builders propose a single dedicated handicapped parking space and 0 loading spaces, where normally 104 spaces and 2 loading spaces would be required under city ordinance. The builders have requested an extraordinary special provision: a reduction of 103 parking spaces and 2 loading spaces. This is simply unacceptable.

Property owners in the vicinity of this planned structure (myself included) – especially those occupying residential units to the west of the proposed building site – will have their harbor views obstructed, thereby negatively impacting their property values. The Historic District is meant to be a protected zone wherein new, anachronistic high-rise structures are prohibited. For purposes of the present construction project under consideration, the zoning directives of the Historic District are not being enforced.

That a project of this nature and magnitude would even be *considered* for a site inside the historic district boundaries is appalling. That this project is being considered for approval as planned without formally soliciting the valuable experience, input, and guidance from the Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE) is outrageous. This planned structure runs counter to the stated mission of the New Bedford Preservation Society, as well: to “promote sensitive restoration and preservation of New Bedford's fine historic structures and the neighborhoods in which they are located.”

Therefore, I ask you, in your capacity as a New Bedford City Councilor, to join me in opposing the construction of this outsized, unsightly project in the heart of New Bedford's historic district, which will mar the city center's skyline, detract from the authenticity of the Historic District, introduce problems caused by insufficient parking and excessive population concentrated in one edifice, and harm the architectural integrity of this singular New Bedford city block.

Thank you for your attention and efforts in this matter.



Dr. Timothy D. Walker
Professor of History
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

twalker@umassd.edu
15 Maple Street
New Bedford, MA 02740